**The essential question asked by Gary Paulsen in The River is, “How should one behave in the face of overwhelming difficulty?” The answer that Paulsen gives is that to overcome an overwhelming difficulty, one should be, brave, calm and smart. Brian was brave enough to go out again in the woods. He also did not panic and was smart enough to use his resources.**

Brian Robeson, the main character in Gary Paulsen’s The River, is brave, smart, caring, loving. The main character trait of Brian Robeson is his bravery. By braveness we mean calm because Brian does not panic in a bad situation. Brian shows his braveness on page 57 when he helped Derek when he got struck by lightning and then on.

Four traits that Brian has are brave, caring, smart, and calm during bad times. Brave is only one of the out things that Brian shows. Brian was willing to go back in the wild for the safety of other people. He taught people to survive. Brian is very caring. To prove that he is caring, he had taken care of Derek during the time when he got struck by lightning. Brian is super smart because he lasted 2 months in the wild with just a hatchet. He is now ready to teach others how to survive in the wild. Lastly he had stayed calm the entire time that he was out in the wild, even though sometimes his life was in danger.

The conflict in the beginning was teaching Derek to survive. He had to think aloud and say everything he knew about surviving. It was hard for him because when he was in the wild alone, he had wanted to talk to someone. But now that he is with Derek in the wild he, does not want to talk with anyone, and share what he is thinking. The conflict towards the end was trying to snap Derek out of his coma. Derek got struck by lightning, and went into a coma. He was unconscious the whole time while Derek and Brian went sailing down the river. In the beginning he was trying to teach, but in the end he was trying to save his companion Derek. The same parts are that they both have their lives on the line.

The problem-solving process that Brian uses to solve his new conflict is the thinking process. There are nine steps in the thinking or problem-solving process.

The first step in the thinking process involves making an inference or a having a perception. This means that a person senses an event. At this moment, the person who sensed the event does not know what it is. Thus, he or she naturally reflects or records what it is that he or she just heard or saw or felt or tasted or smelled, etc. Reflecting/ Wondering is the main moment in the problem-solving steps. Often, this leads the person to investigate further the event that was sensed or observed. If enough information is available, the person will name the event or place the problem that he or she had just sensed. That is the third moment in the thinking process.

Next comes the third step in this problem-solving process: Considering choices or Options.

That is the fourth moment in the thinking process/problem-solving process. Once the person has listed the possible alternatives, then a decision must be made as to which alternative or choice is most logical. The next step, the fifth step, in the process of making this decision is often what we mean when we use the word “thinking.” But really what most often happens here is that the person engages in a mental “what-if game.” Basically, this means that the person tries to make an inference of what in the future what would most likely happen if each choice, or option that, were selected. Based upon those predictions, the problem-solver comes to a solution. That is the sixth moment in the thinking process.

The next, and seventh step, involves planning a plan of how to put the solution into action. After this, the problem-solver gathers facts or information to use when the plan is done. That is the eighth step. Finally, in the ninth step, the problem-solver actually solves or does the solution.

On page 66 of The River, we clearly see an example of the third step in the thinking process: identifying or solving the problem. Here, on page 66, we learn that Brian has a name for Derek’s problem. He says that Derek is in a coma. Shortly, thereafter, on page 67, Brian starts to feel angry at himself for allowing himself to be talked into going back into the woods to teach survival skills to Derek. Brian starts to feel sorry for himself. But then he stops himself, because he sees, or hears himself acting babyish and immature. On page 67 he says, “Listen to me… If I were talking out loud, I’d be whining. Derek gets hit and I act like I’m the one getting messed up.” Derek stops himself from feeling sorry for himself. And then he moves on to trying to solve the problem of saving Derek’s life.

Brian clearly is wondering/reflecting and considering leaving early on page 67 when he thinks, “Could he stay here with Derek for a week or ten days and wait for them? Could he not stay? What choices did he have?” Brian is listing all of the different options that he has.

At the end of this chapter, after Brian senses the smell of human waste; he identifies that Derek has “soiled” himself. Brian chooses a solution when he says, “It had to be done. He had to clean Derek, take care of him, and take care of another human being.”

So, Brian comes up with a plan to clean up Derek’s waste. We read on page 68 that the resources that Brian gathers are facts and information. Then he performs, or does, the solution when he carries Derek’s waste and buries it in a hole.

The thinking process/problem-solving process continues. In chapter 13, on page 71, Brian is clearly reflecting or gathering facts when we read that “He spent the morning trying to remember what he knew” about comas. At the top of page 72, Brian makes an inference about how long he thinks Derek can survive. We read, “But Brian was sure Derek could not go that long without water…. Somewhere he’d heard or read or seen that the human body couldn’t go that long without water.” So, Brian makes a “small spoon like holder out of birch bark” and pours water down Derek’s throat. Here, Brian has used resources and has acted on his mind. When he sees that Derek coughs up the water, Brian finds another problem: Derek cannot drink.

At this point, on page 73, Brian doesn’t know what to do. He throws down a radio, which bounces into Derek’s briefcase. When Brian sees the briefcase, “as if for the first time” he is making an inference. When Brian says, “What have you got in here?” he is remembering/Reflecting. When Brian opens up Derek’s briefcase, he finds the map of the wilderness area where they are. On the map, he saw a river.

Brian unfolds the map and he follows the flow of the river. He observes the words “Brannock trading Post,” on page 78.

When we read that Brian thinks to himself, “There would be people there…. A trading post would have people” we know that he is making a guess. On page 79, we read that Brian calculates that the trading post is about 150 kilometers, or just under 100 miles. When Brian thinks to himself that he could leave Derek and go down the river and bring back help, he is revising the options. But then, he predicts that wild animals might attack or eat Brian. Brian decides that he cannot leave Derek. Here, he is making a decision.

At the very bottom of page 79, we read, “What if he took Derek with him?” Here, Brian is using “what-if” thinking. Once again, this is the step of making a guess. On page 80, Brian makes numerous predictions: “If he stayed, Derek would die of thirst…. If he made the run…at least there was a chance.” Finally, Brian decided a solution at the end of page 80 when we read: “He had no choice.”

At the beginning of chapter 15, Brian calculates that to float down the river would take thirty-five or forty hours. On page 82, he chooses an option when we read, “He needed to build a raft.”

Shortly after that, on page 82, Brian names or faces a problem. The problem is not that he lacks wood, but that he lacks a hatchet to cut wood to build a raft. Luckily, Brian observes on page 83 that beavers have felled trees, and the trees are the right size to make a raft. He thinks, “It’s like I hired them.” Here, Brian is making a decision to use the trees cut down by the beavers. In fact, we read in the next-to-last paragraph on page 84, “He had a plan…for what he was going to do.” On page 85, Brian actually follows, or does his plan. He weaves together the large and small pieces of wood cut down by the beavers, and he cuts strips of fabric from his jacket to hold the logs firmly in place.

At the end of chapter 15, on page 87, Brian must decide if he, in fact, will act on his idea to bring Derek down the river on the raft. So, Brian goes through a process that looks a little like a scientific experiment. He thinks, “… if there was the slightest, tiniest change in Derek…Brian would call off the trip and hope for the best.” When he looks into Derek’s eyes, measures his breathing and his heartbeat, throbbing into his ear, and pokes Derek with his knife, Brian is acting out his experiment. But he is really making contact with his senses. When Derek does not react at all, Brian says, “We go.” Here, he is clearly making a decision.

In chapter 16, the thinking process/problem-solving process continues. On pages 92 and 93, Brian slowly drags Derek down to the raft, which is in the river. He places Derek onto the raft. But just before he pushes off into the river, Brian has a sudden thought, “What if they came unexpectedly?” Here, Brian is both wondering/reflecting, considering options and making a prediction, because he is realizing that they might come to check on them suddenly. So, Brian goes right to the step of choosing a plan. He decides that he has to write a note to rescuers just in case they show up. Brian writes the note. He is acting or planning.

And then, on pages 94 and 95, Brian performs one last “scientific” experiment. He tests the raft to see if it is seaworthy, whether it will hold both himself and Derek. Brian plans or does his experiment by climbing on the raft and by rocking back and forth. He sees that the raft will not tip over. Thus, Brian makes a final decision to act on his solution and push off into the river.

In chapter 18, Brian had seen a waterfall. He tried to row away, but the current was to strong. It took both him and the raft down. He hit his head on a rock and passes out. He woke up, without the raft or Derek in sight. He swam to go find the raft. He turned every corner, but there was still no raft.

He swam around a corner, and saw Derek’s feet sticking up out of the water. It was so easy to miss. He swam over fast, and turned the raft over. He got on and rode downstream. Soon he developed blisters on his hands. He didn’t give up. They soon reached a dock. A dog was barking insanely at him. Then a nice man and women and their son pulled them out, while Derek was still in a coma.

Over all, Brian and Derek traveled 119 miles down the river. Derek’s coma was low grade, and he probably would have been alright if even if Brian hadn’t made the run. He began to come out of the coma in another week, and had fully recovered after 6 months. During the run, Brian lost 12 pounds mostly in fluids.

In conclusion, Brian learned to survive in the woods with nothing. He could teach others and still survive twice in the woods. He had made shelter, found food and survived. He comes through obstacles and still copes with it. Kayla wants to be a teacher, so like Brian, she has to be intelligent, nice, and calm to cope with kids. I, Karla want to be an actress/ singer and I have to be intelligent, nice and calm to perfect singing and acting.